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**Testimony of Steve Bender, Executive Director, 1199 Training & Upgrading Fund  
to the Commerce Committee**

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Good afternoon. I am Steve Bender, Executive Director of the 1199 Training and Upgrading Fund. My organization provides educational programs, career counseling, and case management for nursing home workers who are members of the New England Health Care Employees Union, District 1199. I am here as a member of the Campaign for a Working Connecticut to urge you support H.B. No. 5584 AN ACT INCREASING FUNDING FOR THE INCUMBENT WORKER TRAINING PROGRAM .

State incumbent worker training dollars are used to provide training and educational programs at the workplace.

Before I give the rest of my testimony, I'd like to read something written by one of our members, a Certified Nursing Aid who took a class offered last spring at her workplace. This class was paid for in part by incumbent worker dollars.

*"I want to thank my union representative and my employer for bringing the concept of school-at-work into our workplace. We now have the head start to a new career. It has been said that it is not the big things in life, but the small things, that make a difference. I am feeling that this workplace educational opportunity, which seemed to have started out small, will turn into something very big."*

This CNA, after getting a chance to take this class at her workplace last spring, is now in her second semester at Capital Community College, and is doing well. She plans to go to nursing school, and I bet she'll make a great nurse.

When I learned recently that the State of Connecticut only spends \$500,000 per year in incumbent worker training dollars, I was shocked. Even Rhode Island spends over \$9,000,000 in such dollars, let alone Massachusetts which spends over \$23,000,000. This bill is asking for just over \$5,000,000, which will allow our state to begin catching up to our neighbors.

Our union's Training Fund is a joint labor/management program of District 1199, and nursing homes that have contracts with the union. Each year, hundreds of nursing home workers attend school with the help of our organization. The nursing homes that contribute to the Fund pay the equivalent of 1% of gross payroll per month of their unionized employees. The money is pooled together, and all of these employees are eligible for our programs and benefits. In 2007 the Fund received over \$1 million in contributions from the employers, and hundreds of their employees participated in our programs.

We also partner with many other organizations, and access incumbent worker dollars, to help offer classes for our members.

The state is full of low-wage workers ready to climb up the career ladder ...if only given the chance. The kinds of programs supported with incumbent worker dollars make a big difference.

Currently, we're part of a healthcare initiative sponsored by Capital Workforce Partners with partners including eight Hartford area nursing homes, area community colleges, and adult education providers. The basic skills courses now operating at these nursing homes are funded in part by state incumbent worker training dollars. Generally, the employer provides a 50% match for incumbent worker dollars, but in the case of the union homes

in this project, the Training Fund is providing that “employer match” out of our general budget.

Low-wage workers in other industries are just as motivated and just as deserving of the opportunities to move ahead. It’s a struggle, though, as low-wage workers in all industries often have to work difficult hours, and sometimes work more than one job.

Because of this reality, it is vital that the state make investments in our workers in the ways supported by our Campaign.

When the right partners come together, the whole is often greater than the sum of the parts. We’ve seen it demonstrated in some of the partnerships that we’ve been part of, and look forward to more creative and innovative thinking that will help people reach their potential.

I hope that you see the value of investing in our current workforce all over the state. Should the state decide to increase it’s spending of incumbent worker training dollars, the many partners in the Campaign for a Working Connecticut, including employers throughout the state, are ready to go.

